THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 1919.

SCIENCE IN PARLIAMENT.

THE practical absence of leading representatives of scientific knowledge and research in the new Parliament is the subject of an article in the *Times* of January 21. Among the 707 members there are only two Fellows of the Royal Society, Mr. Balfour and Sir Joseph Larmor, neither of whom can be considered specifically to represent science. The work of Parliament is more and more coming to be a sordid scrimmage of hereditary, vested, class, and sectional interests. Out of the base-metal of the various self-seeking coteries represented—agrarian, commercial, financial, professional, proletarian, and so on—by some obscure alchemy too absurd for belief, Westminster is supposed to effect a synthesis of the pure gold of wisdom, and in its odd moments from this conjuring entertainment to administer the affairs of an Empire on which the sun never sets. The helpless public, as in America at its worst, is on the point of abandoning its government to a peculiar people with aptitudes and codes of conduct which in their private life they abhor and despise, and with an intellectual outlook and unteachableness similar to that of the traditional type of public-school legislator whom they have succeeded, but without their reputation for integrity, altruism, and incorruptibility. The practical problem is, How are the learned men—of whose learning and research the twentieth century is, and from whose brains and laboratories arises the necessity for the metamorphosis now blindly and vehemently convulsing it—to pull with something more nearly approximating their true weight *dans cette galère?*

In the article referred to, Members of Parliament are divided into two classes:—First, representatives of the great working-class organisations, the subscriptions of which supply the necessary election funds, and the membership of which gives the necessary electoral backing to secure their return; and, secondly, persons with money and leisure, derived from an inherited or acquired competence, sufficient to enable them to woo an electorate. A third class, numerically perhaps the most important of all, might have been distinguished, the nominees of the party organisations, the election funds of which are derived from origins that are not disclosed, but are generally believed—such is the rottenness of the State of Denmark—to be discreditable in degrees varying from the corrupt sale of honours and peerages to the "legitimate" contributions of powerful sectional interests. The men who devote their lives to scientific studies and investigations, all unintentionally and almost unconsciously rearranging thereby the foundations of society against its will, do not acquire such a competence as election expenses require, and have no mass following in the electorate, who rarely hear their names. Neither are they by intellectual training and character the stuff out of which sound party men, beloved of the caucuses, are made, voting "straight" on the great party issues in return for unconsidered trifles in the way of preferment, influence, and nepotism. They are segregated, to their own and the nation's detriment, from any share in the solution of the vast and overwhelming problems which their activities in the first instance create.

A further difficulty, though one common alike to all doing any work worth doing, whether creative, constructive, or merely vocational, is that a parliamentary career involves, at least for the time being, the sacrifice of their own field of work. This, which may appear to many, at first sight, a consequence fatal to the proper representation of science in Parliament, as a matter of fact is faced daily under existing economic conditions by the scientific investigator in its acutest form. By virtue of his eminence in investigation he is selected for some desirable bread-winning position, and, though he continue by force of habit for a time to strive to retain a footing in his original domain, amid the responsibilities and professional duties his office entails, Nemesis has him, and does it much matter whether it carry him to Westminster or to a university principalship or professorship? Besides, many go willingly enough. Was it not Huxley who said that one of the besetting sins of the investigator was the craving for change and novelty, the turning from the field that has been explored to the fascination of the new? Scores sacrifice their special gifts for causes relatively trivial on the altar of duty to their own microcosm, and why not a few to the primary affairs of the nation?

The practical problem thus in its essentials is twofold: the provision of election expenses, and the provision of the electorate. With regard to the first, the suggestion has been made that the Conjoint Board of Scientific Societies should institute an election fund, as is done by the National Union of Teachers and other bodies, and as, presumably, is contemplated by the medical profession in its recent action to secure more adequate representation in Parliament. Once a line of action is decided upon, the first question can scarcely involve any insuperable difficulty. It is the second that brings us at once to the real practical problem.

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In a previous article on this subject (NATURE, October 24, 1918) the issue is clearly raised as between the narrow class representation of science in its own interests in Parliament, and the need of having qualified men of science there as citizens, free to use their special knowledge and qualifications in the national interest as a whole; and the latter ideal is frankly and powerfully upheld. Expert witnesses of a party, or impartial social servants of the community, under which banner are the scientific investigators who are to be asked to sacrifice their life-work to be called upon to serve? If the first, then no one but the type of prospective candidates to whom such work would be congenial, and the scientific organisations likely to benefit materially and directly by their advocacy, will consider the matter worthy of a second thought. Science is, not yet at least, an interest, an organisation, or a profession, but transcends these aspects no less than the welfare of the nation transcends that of the coteries that represent it in Parliament.

There remains the second ideal that men of science should claim their place on the broad and old-fashioned base of impartial and disinterested social service to the nation. If it had not been for the war, to find constituencies for such candidates would doubtless have appeared very Utopian and impracticable. The nation has, however, been brought violently back to its ideals, and that of disinterested social service for the general weal, which the Government demanded of its citizens in war, will in turn be demanded by the nation of its politicians in peace. In a political contest between idealism and materialism almost any sort of idealism is likely to prevail. The wide idealism of the Labour Party has probably gained for it far more adherents than its extreme views and divided war counsels have repelled. Conditions are now fluid, as they never were before, and, when they set, as soon they must, any scheme founded merely on the peculiar standards of to-day's political expediency may find itself nipped at the root. A scheme to send men of science into Parliament to represent in the general scrimmage of interests their own special wants, in return for due allegiance to the party that arranges their election, must reckon with the fervent intention of the overwhelming majority of disinterested electors in this country to prevent in future the rigging of elections, and with the power that proportional representation, already in operation in the university constituencies, gives them to stop it absolutely.

But it is idle to wait until another election is on the country. To have the slightest chance of success, the work should begin now, an election fund should be raised, and a group of prospective scientific candidates got together under a leader of enthusiasm familiar with the inner labyrinth of the political world. With the help of men of goodwill among their own colleagues, the temper of the electorate being what it is and nearly all men of goodwill in the nation awaiting a lead, such a group might find itself in Parliament as soon as, or even before, it was ready to perform its salutary and necessary task in the grave work that lies ahead. But the claim of these candidates to election must rest on the broad and elementary ground that their life-work has given them special knowledge and insight into the scientific discoveries which in the short space of a few generations have revolutionised the whole world, and which the Mother of Parliaments will ignore and continue to run counter to only at the nation's peril.

PHYSICS: ANCIENT AND MODERN.

On the Nature of Things. By Dr. Hugh Woods. Pp. v + 248. (Bristol: John Wright and Sons, Ltd., 1918.) Price 10*s*. 6*d*. net.

The New Science of the Fundamental Physics. By Dr. W. W. Strong. Pp. xi + 107. (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: S.I.E.M. Co., 1918.) Price 1.25 dollars.

(1) DR. WOODS puts forward "a new scientific theory," and asks that his views "shall be carefully considered and supported if they appear true, or attacked if they seem false." He could ask nothing more difficult to grant. Judged by the canons of men of science, his views are certainly incorrect, always when they are new, and sometimes when they are not; his book suggests an essay written by somebody who attended a course of popular lectures at the Royal Institution twenty-five years ago, and afterwards lost his notes.

But, of course, Dr. Woods, though he may not know it, does not accept those canons. He believes, as his title suggests, that truth is to be found in a return to Lucretius. Now the difference between Lucretius and a modern student of science is not so much in what they believe to be true as in what they believe to be truth. Both are concerned to "explain phenomena," and to both explanation consists formally in showing that the observed facts can be deduced from some set of general principles. But if any principles were permissible, anything could be explained without the smallest trouble, for it is very easy to find a set of propositions from which any other set may be deduced. The principles must fulfil some other condition. This condition is that the principles give a certain form of intellectual satisfaction. It is here that we differ from Lucretius and Dr. Woods; the kind of explanation that appeals to us does not appeal to them. *De gustibus non est disputandum.* Of course, we say that the principles which give us the intellectual satis-

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